

REVIEW ARTICLE

North Korea, Fascism and Stalinism: On B. R. Myers' *The Cleanest Race*

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The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves—and Why It Matters

B. R. Myers (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2010)

The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves – and Why It Matters is a small book whose main text is 140 pages. The jacket says Myers traces North Korean “official culture back to Japanese fascist thought” and that North Korea is neither “a bastion of Stalinism nor a Confucian patriarchy but a paranoid nationalist, ‘military-first’ state on the far right of the political spectrum.” The preface adds that the regime is “ideologically closer to America’s adversaries in World War II than to communist China and Eastern Europe” (Myers, 2010: 15–16). Apparently aimed at US politicians, the publication is endorsed by Mike Gravel, former Democratic senator for Alaska: “Myers renders great service to the global foreign policy establishment,” and his book should be “mandatory reading” for the “American establishment.” Gravel is a critic of the US “war on terrorism” and the right-wing slogan of “Islamofascism,” yet he supports the claim that North Korea is ideologically fascist, this after President Barack Obama’s June 2009 statement that the impoverished, nuclear-armed state is a “grave threat.” Writing in the tradition of “axis of evil” cultural criticism, Myers does not contribute towards a better understanding of North Korea and obfuscates the national-Stalinist regime (Chen and Lee, 2007: 459–75) with ahistorical, selective and subjective interpretations.

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Fascism and Stalinism

The Cleanest Race is divided into two parts, “A History of North Korea’s Official Culture” and “Understanding North Korea through Its Myths.” Comprising one-third of the book, the first part is a cursory history from the Japanese protectorate over Korea in 1905 to former President Bill Clinton’s August 2009 visit to North Korea to secure pardons for detained US journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee. The next two-thirds look at “myths” – the more accurate word is “legends” – in domestic propaganda: “Mother Korea and Her Children,” “The Parent Leader,” “The Dear Leader,” “Foreigners” and “The Yankee Colony” South Korea. Myers repeats thoughts from his opinion columns in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, saying North Korea is not Confucian, Communist, *Juche*-orientated, Marxist-Leninist, or Stalinist and that it cannot be compared to the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc states. His position is that fascist-era Korean intellectuals created North Korean culture and adopted Japanese fascist symbolism; that race predominates over class; and that the propaganda promotes emotional spontaneity and a maternal cult, which are said to be foreign to the Soviet Union and its satellites.

Attempting to drive the claim, *The Cleanest Race* reproduces posters and paintings; translates poems and narrative excerpts; discusses metaphors, meanings and monumental architecture; describes how North Koreans and foreigners are portrayed; and documents racist tropes used for US and Japanese villains, for instance, terms like “bastards,” “vampires” and wolves for “Yankees,” who have “muzzles, snouts, and paws” (Myers, 2010: 134-6, 148, 150). Myers unfortunately mistranslates the Korean word for “wild dog” or “wolf” (*sŭngnyangi*) as “jackal,” an animal that is not indigenous to Northeast Asia. Such is how he renders the title of Han Sorya’s canonical anti-American novella from 1951. Relying on the grotesque, Han’s tale of racist and murderous Christian missionaries was written during the catastrophic US-led military intervention in the Korean War (1950-53). Dehumanisation and demonisation, as Han employed, remain typical literary devices in North Korea. Curse words such as “bastards,” “devils,” “dogs” and “wolves” appear on the (North) Korean Central News Agency website. Arguing the fascist case, Myers (2010: 18) provides summaries, two to three pages in length, of official North Korean state legends. Altogether, he calls the collective body of ideological propaganda the “Text.”

What throws Myers off are the politics of North Korean propaganda and the political character of the dictatorial regime. The Pyongyang government promotes at home an ethnic nationalist and racist ideology of North Koreans as morally virtuous, innocent as children and racially pure, but not physically superior, he says (2010: 79). Because Korea was a colony of the Japanese Empire from 1910 to 1945, the Japanese fascist turn occurring in the 1930s, with many Korean intellectuals collaborating with the colonial-fascist government – this was a wartime period – Myers concludes that ethno-nationalism in North Korea is rooted in Japanese fascism, that the ideology of the regime is fascist and that North Korea is a fascist state of a non-imperialist sort (2010: 166). The exiled Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky long ago pointed out in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) the problem that is occurring here: “Stalinism and fascism, in spite of a *deep difference in social*

foundations, are symmetrical phenomena. In many of their features they show a deadly similarity” (emphasis added). Symmetry and similarity in the ideologies of North Korean national-Stalinism and Japanese fascism are what allow Myers to misconstrue them as an identity.

One should note that Joseph Stalin admired fascist art and sought Nazi sculptor Arno Breker in 1937 and 1946 (Steinberg, 2006). Race, racial pride and racism were also realities in the Soviet Union, though officially denied. There was Great Russian chauvinism, anti-Semitism and xenophobic extremism. The Soviet maternal cult was not applied to male leaders as in the Pyongyang regime (for example, Kim Jong Il as a “great mother”), but there was the familiar image of the “motherland” (*rodina*) and the fact that Stalin and Zhukov referred to the Soviet Communist Party as a “our mother” and a “mother party” (Stalin, 1954: 143; Chaney, 1996: 428). As for the Soviet people, they were not only the party’s children, but “Stalin’s children,” as seen in a poem sent to the Eighteenth Party Congress in 1939 (Siegelbaum and Sokolov, 2000: 196). North Korea employs the same parent-child metaphors and has referred to its own Workers’ Party of Korea as a “mother party” since the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s (J. I. Kim, 1965). Myers, for reasons that are not explained, gives the impression that Soviet Stalinism was an ideological non-presence in North Korean history, that Japanese fascism was decisive.

The facts are that the regime of Kim Il Sung – who served with the Soviet Army from 1941 to 1945 – was under Soviet supervision from 1945 to 1948 and tutelage until 1950, adopting orthodox Stalinist political, organisational, institutional, economic, cultural and bureaucratic apparatuses and, importantly, Stalin’s conservative nationalist programme of “socialism in one country,” which North Korea still upholds. The relevant Korean terms are *hannara sahoejuui* (one-country socialism) and *urishik sahoejuui* (our-style socialism). To paraphrase Jae-Cheon Lim (2009: 19), North Korea was intensively Sovietised. Regarding Confucianism, despite half a millennium of Neo-Confucian rule in the feudal Choson era (1392–1910), North Korea is not a Confucian state proper, as Adrian Buzo (1999: 46–8) has explained. Confucian principles were, however, selectively appropriated in the process of North Korean state formation (J. W. Kang, 2006). Kim Il Sung, in his well-known *Juche* speech of 28 December 1955, even spoke of the need to study the Neo-Confucian scholars Pak Yonam and Chong Tasan (I. S. Kim, 1965: 316–17). By the 1970s, Confucian values such as loyalty and filial piety were re-appreciated in the lead-up to the succession of Kim Il Sung’s son, Kim Jong Il (J. C. Lim, 2009: 147). The assimilation and exploitation of Confucianism in North Korean national-Stalinism is consistent with what Robert C. Tucker (1999: 98) has termed “the strong element of ‘archaization’ in Stalinism,” which revived Tsarist patterns of development in the Soviet case.

Convinced that there is nothing Stalinist in North Korea and that the “Stalinist-Confucian model” is a Western fabrication, Myers contrasts Soviet and North Korean narratives on absolute terms, refusing association with *socialist realism* (Myers, 2010: 16, 79, 81). That is curious since he cites the manuscript of Tatiana Gabroussenko’s *Soldiers on the Cultural Front*, based on her 2004 doctoral dissertation (Gabroussenko, 2004), which stated that *socialist realism* was successfully implanted in North Korea from 1945 to 1960. Myers does not reveal

Gabroussenko's findings to his readers. Rather, he says things like, "The lack of conflict makes North Korean narratives seem dull even in comparison to Soviet fiction." One is to imagine this "lack of conflict" has something to do with Japanese fascism, Myers referring to colonial-era "Japanese schmaltz" (Myers, 2010: 91, 92). Historian Charles K. Armstrong (2003: 180) has said that North Korea was constructed at the "height of Zhdanovism." A year into the Soviet occupation, Stalin's cultural Tsar Andrei Zhdanov, whom Kim Il Sung met on 14 August 1945 and several times after (*Korean News*, 1998; I. S. Kim, 2003), promulgated the totalitarian literary theory of "conflictlessness" (*bezkonfliktnost'*) in the Soviet Union. Hyun Soo Lim (1988-89: 177-93) has discussed the guiding role of Zhdanovism in North Korean literary policy. Suffice it to say that "conflictlessness" in North Korean literature reflects a faithful adoption of Stalinist-Zhdanovist principles in a distinctively *national form of socialist realism*. Given the Stalinist historical, economic and political foundations of North Korea, it is not surprising to find that much of what Myers describes in North Korean propaganda – conflictlessness, cult of personality, infantilisation, maternalism, militarism, monumentalism, nationalism, racism, rightism, xenophobia – is characteristically Stalinist. That is confirmed in Soviet studies scholarship (see Daniels, 1993: 77-8, 83-4; Gerner and Hedlund, 1989: 201-6; Tucker, 1990: 591-2; Ulam, 1998: vii-xiii; Wood, 2004: 74).

Not considering the historical and sociological facts of Stalinism, argument by analogy is as far as *The Cleanest Race* goes with the claim that North Korean ideology is the offspring of Japanese fascism. But even if there are similarities, how does Myers account for the significant differences – structural, economic, political and ideological – between North Korea and fascist Japan? The answer is "He doesn't." Employing the diminutive "some observers" in reference to Charles K. Armstrong, who is identified in the endnotes and bibliography (the book has no index), Myers rejects for a more extreme position Armstrong's view that the Kim cult borrowed "elements" from the Hirohito cult. "They [the personality cults of Kim Il Sung and Emperor Hirohito] are *fundamentally* alike, because they derive from a fundamentally similar worldview," Myers (2010: 109; italics in original) declares. *The Cleanest Race* provides no historical evidence to corroborate that proposition, nor analysis of the mystical handbook of Japanese fascism, *Kokutai no Hongi* (1937). Besides, the point about fundamental likeness is logically wrong. Practices are not by necessity fundamentally "alike" simply by way of derivation from "similar" sets of ideas. Personality Cult A is *not equal* to Personality Cult B *just because* Worldview A is *approximately equal* to Worldview B. Another illogical statement is seen when Myers says, "A personality cult comes into being when a one-man dictatorship presents itself as a democracy" (2010: 98). That makes no sense, given that Mussolini, Hitler and Hirohito opposed democracy.

Notably absent from *The Cleanest Race* is North Korean studies scholarship that supports Myers' view that North Korea has a fascist-derived ideology. Gi-Wook Shin's *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea* (2006), a macrohistorical-sociological study of Korean ethnic-racial ideology as a reaction to Japanese imperialism and colonialism, is only referenced for the well-known fact that Marxism-Leninism was no longer publicised in North Korea in the mid-1990s. Shin (2006: 75) says the ideology of

North Korea under Kim Il Sung was “nationalist Communism,” whereas that of Kim Jong Il is “nationalism, not Socialism or Communism.” Shin does not deny Japanese fascist traces in North Korea. He underlines the influential pre-1945 organic nationalism of Korean historian Sin Ch’aeho and Korean novelist Yi Kwangsu, saying “it is hardly surprising to find Japanese fascist elements in the North Korean political system,” since Yi’s nationalism had an “elective affinity” (a Weberian term) with pre-war Japanese fascism (Shin, 2006: 95). Shin (2006: 98, 100, 230) adds that a latent “fascist potential” in Korean ethnic nationalism was actualised in *both Koreas* after the joint US-Soviet liberation on 15 August 1945, but he does not go as far as Myers.

Working with an abstract idea of Japanese fascism, Myers problematises his claims when he briefly quotes Zeev Sternhell on ideology (Myers, 2010: 16). The fascist studies scholar has advanced a definition of fascism that contradicts its application to North Korea. One may turn to Sternhell’s essay “Fascism: Reflections on the Fate of Ideas in the Twentieth Century” (2000). Here, fascism is an anti-internationalist, anti-materialist and anti-rationalist ideology that exalts the force of the will, race being incidental; fascism disdains democracy, liberalism and socialism; and fascism preserves the social and economic structure of capitalism as its basis. Despite the fact that North Korean ideology espouses voluntarist, undemocratic and nationalist conceptions, its economic basis and objectives – nationalised property, state planning and “socialism in one country” – distinguish it from fascism. As Sternhell (2000: 158) states, “Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism were all single-party regimes, but they were very different dictatorial systems, and worlds apart in the objectives they set themselves.”

Myers’ boldness of assertion and hasty generalisation in *The Cleanest Race* probably result from routinisation and overspecialisation. In a 2007 open lecture in Seoul (Myers, 2007) discussing his book, which was then in progress, he said, “My specialty is actually literature,” and “I’m using paintings and stuff although I am not really an expert on the visual arts.” If routinisation and overspecialisation are the problems, that might explain why key terms from cultural studies, historiography, political science, psychology and sociology used in *The Cleanest Race* are not substantiated, for example, fascism, ideology, nationalism, paranoia, propaganda and race. While Myers aims to explain the “dominant ideology or worldview” of North Koreans, he also does not make clear sociological distinctions (Myers, 2010: 15). His conclusions are drawn from state-controlled propaganda without examining social history, social structure and social groups. Where he lacks empirical and sociological evidence, he uses depth psychology. Why psychodynamics is appropriated is not clear. Myers (2010: 110) says, “I am not qualified to analyze the cult (or anything else) from a psychological standpoint” (parentheses in original). Nevertheless, he turns to psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Erich Fromm and Ernest Becker. The problem is that these figures represent conflicting psychoanalytic schools. What method justifies the collapse of classical psychoanalysis, analytical psychoanalysis, humanist psychoanalysis and existential psychoanalysis in the examination of North Korean ideology and official propaganda? Psychoanalytic eclecticism runs the risk of haphazard interpretation, and that is what results in *The Cleanest Race* (Myers, 2010: 73, 75, 80-1, 109, 110).

Juche*, Maoism and *Songun

Myers, in his fixation with fascism, does not take the North Korean ideology of *Juche* (independent stand or spirit of self-reliance) seriously, dismissing it as a “show-window doctrine” and a “sham doctrine” that conceals the true guiding ideology of “paranoid, race-based nationalism” (Myers, 2010: 15, 16, illus. 12). He claims that “*Juche Thought* ... was not even spoken of until the cultural revolution of the mid-1960s” (Myers, 2010: illus. 12). “*Juche Thought*” (*juche sasang*) was first used in 1962 during the Sino-Soviet split (K. W. Kang, 2001: 363). Political scientist and senior North Korea specialist Han S. Park, whose relevant work Myers does not cite, states the following about *Juche*:

North Korea has made itself politically centrist, ideologically paternalist, economically collectivist, *ethnically racist*, diplomatically isolationist, and *culturally nationalist*. These characteristics have become crystallized with the advent of the *Juche* (self-reliance) belief system. (Park, 1996: 2; emphasis added)

If ethnic racism and cultural nationalism are characteristics of *Juche*, why does Myers say it *conceals* racism and nationalism? Park adds in his *North Korea* (2002) – a study of *Juche* ideology and the North Korean mindset – that *Juche* is a form of Korean nationalism engendered in resistance to Japanese colonialism. *Juche* progressed to “antiforeignism to an ethnocentric sense of national superiority, which guides the worldview of *Juche* itself.” Park says the *Juche* regime (1) socialises people through media (e.g. film) to believe that “the North is ideologically, morally, and socially superior to the South,” which is seen as a pitiful US colony; (2) inculcates notions of “physical and cultural superiority” that “bolster the people’s sense of pride and ethnic superiority;” (3) exploits “an almost pure nationalism rooted in the remarkably homogeneous ethnic population;” (4) systematically encourages “*belief* of racial superiority” that results in “the *sentiment* of racial and ethnic superiority;” and (5) makes North Koreans “almost obsessed with nationalism” since their education and political socialisation are “loaded with nationalist themes and ethnic pride” (Park, 2002: 18, 70, 89, 171, 177; emphasis added). All of this is combined with a “politics of fear” of US, South Korean and Japanese military attack (Park, 2002: 68). History and proximity make that fear quite real. Park does not consider North Korea to be Marxist or Stalinist, but nationalist and theocratic. He makes no reference to fascism.

Despite the ethnic nationalism of *Juche*, Myers bizarrely refers to its central axioms, “man is the master of all things” and “people are born with creativity and autonomy,” as “universal-humanist bromides” (Myers, 2010: 46). Neither of these is a case of humanism and universalism. Corliss Lamont’s classic *The Philosophy of Humanism* (Lamont 1997: 13-14) readily clarifies the democratic, international, naturalistic and scientific principles of humanism, which recognise that human action lies within objective limits. The *Juche* axioms are statements of anthropocentrism and particularism (David-West, 2009). Myers seems to be unaware of the philosophical and political divergences between humanistic universalism and anthropocentric particularism. Despite pro forma and ritualistic references to the

working class, *Juche* has been a particularist ideology since its introduction in Kim Il Sung's 1955 speech, which emphasised ethnic-racial pride (*minjokjok chabushim*). The nationalist particularism of *Juche* is also seen in Kim Jong Il's 19 June 1997 speech on *Juche* character and national character, which celebrates "blood and soul" regardless of class, social system or country of residence (J. I. Kim, 1997). But this is ignored.

Besides *Juche*, the other great omission in Myers' book is the deep influence of Maoism in North Korea. Reading *The Cleanest Race*, one will learn that relations between China and North Korea worsened when Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966 and that Chinese troops made several incursions across the North Korean border (Myers, 2010: 43). Yet one would never know that Kim Il Sung was a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member in the 1930s and fluent in Chinese; that his Soviet occupation-approved policies of the united front and mass party in the 1940s were borrowed from Mao; that the North Korean leader and his Manchurian guerrillas, who took power after the North Korean Great Purge (1956-60), were once part of a CCP military unit; that North Korean soldiers fought in the Chinese Civil War from 1945 to 1950; that China had a military presence in North Korea from the Korean War (1950-53) to 1958; that Kim Il Sung sided with Mao against the so-called "de-Stalinisation" campaign in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; and that North Korea adopted the Maoist mass line and military line in the early 1960s (J. C. Lim, 2009: 17-19; Koh, 1978: 626-43). Myers briefly mentions emulation of the Chinese Great Leap Forward (1956-61) and says North Korea "kept pace" with Mao's personality cult (Myers, 2010: 41, 44). Still, the intimate history with Maoism is overlooked, not to mention Maoist anti-Westernism, Great Han chauvinism, isolationism, nationalism, voluntarism and xenophobia, all of which have strong parallels in North Korea.

Since paintings and posters are discussed by Myers, it is remarkable that he does not take note of Maoist motifs in North Korean posters – book-wielding figures, rifle-carrying soldiers and citizens, smashing fists and hammers, Lilliputian enemies and impalings. Such iconography became prominent after Kim Il Sung initiated the military build-up policy in 1962. Maoist-style imagery was dramatically redeployed with the unfolding of the crisis-ridden, post-Soviet 1990s and the advent of Kim Jong Il's *Songun* (military-first) doctrine. Summed up in Kim's slogans "the rifle stands above the hammer and sickle" and "precedence of the army over the working class," *Songun* first appeared on the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) website in 1998. The official translation, "army-first," was used from 1999 to 2006 and dropped for the transliteration, which has been online since 2003. *Songun*, the *de facto* ideology of North Korea for eleven years, became official with the new *Songun* constitution of April 2009. *The Cleanest Race*, publicised as a "full-length study" of North Korean ideology, does not examine *Songun* and its political legends, for example, the two pistols of Kim Hyong Jik, the mother of *Songun* Kim Jong Suk, the military hero-martyrs of the 1990s Kim Kwang Chol and Kil Yong Jo, the revolutionary soldier spirit, the Kanggye spirit and the torch of Ranam. Myers simply points to Japanese fascism and talks about "kamikaze slogans" and the Japanese "self-defense state" (Myers, 2010: 15, 85, 125).

The Cleanest Race is also selective about comparisons of Chinese and North Korean narratives. According to Myers, the North Korean “Text” glorifies country life (Myers, 2010: 87). From its outset, however, the North Korean regime did not place political faith in the peasantry (Armstrong, 2003: 64-5). North Korea, in addition, is an industrial country, even if dysfunctional (Nam, 1998: 234). Nonetheless, Myers (2010: 179, note 47) says, “In Soviet and Chinese narrative, in contrast, the countryside was often depicted as a place of ignorance and reaction.” Myers’ “classic examples” are Mikhail Sholokhov’s *Virgin Soil Upturned* (1932) and Ding Ling’s *The Sun Shines over the Sanggang River* (1948). How is a pre-revolutionary Chinese novel, whose author was denounced and purged as a “rightist” in 1957 and her work banned, representative of the national form of *socialist realism* developed under Mao? Sholokhov’s novels, moreover, were branded as “revisionist writing” in China by the time of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Contrary to Myers, not only were the countryside and village glorified in Chinese fiction – in accordance with the Maoist conception of peasant-based socialism – there was a genre of “agricultural novels” (Yang, 1998: 7, 74). As per Mao’s 1963 policy to learn from the People’s Liberation Army, there was also the genre of “military novels” and a density of military words and expressions in Chinese fiction (Yang 1998: 6, 7, 245). The development of *Songun*-era literature, which develops the military-orientated literature of the North Korean 1960s, bears pronounced similarities to, if not adaptations from, Maoist military literature, but prioritisation of the country over the city is not one of them.

Songun echoes Mao’s notion that the army is the bulwark of society and a “great school.” *Songun* also repeats the 1960s Maoist slogans “learn from the PLA” and “army-people unity” (Gittings, 1966-67: 271, 287). Notably, Mao’s 1938 dictum “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” a mantra during the Cultural Revolution, is reincarnated in Kim Jong Il’s so-called “gun barrel philosophy” (*ch’ongdae ch’orhak*), which appeared on the Korean edition of the KCNA website in 1999. One North Korean poster from 2000 captures the doctrine as follows: “Revolution is pioneered through the barrel of a gun and advances to victory through the barrel of a gun!” (*Hyongmyong ūn ch’ongdaero kaech’ok doego ch’ongdaero chonjinhamyo sŭngnihanda!*) Even the reckless nuclear bravado of the North Korean regime, “Let the imperialist enemies come at us with their nuclear weapons” (Myers, 2010: 124), recalls Mao’s readiness for China to enter a nuclear war with the USA. As with Maoism, *Songun* holds that armed military force – not the development of the productive forces and social revolution – is the principal motor of history (C. U. Kim, 2002; J. I. Kim, 2007). That is not surprising in view of the colonial-era roots of the North Korean regime in Maoist anti-Japanese guerrillaism. Contrariwise, Myers (2010: 125) claims that North Korean propaganda uses Japanese fascist terms in Korean translation, namely, *kyolsa* (dare-to-die) and *yukt’an* (human bomb). While the latter may or may not be a borrowing from Japanese Imperial Army parlance, the former is a Chinese military term. “Dare-to-die” (*gansi*) dates back to the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) and “dare-to-die corps” (*gansidui*) has been popular since the late Qing dynasty (1644-1912). Mao used the phrase “dare-to-die”; there was the CCP Anti-Japanese Dare-to-Die Corps in Shanxi in the 1930s;

there were Chinese “dare-to-die troops” who strapped themselves with dynamite and ran into Japanese tanks; and there was the Red Guard Dare-to-Die Corps during the Cultural Revolution. With its Stalinist and Maoist heritage and system of militarised “barracks socialism” (Armstrong, 2007: 201), neither North Korea nor its ideology can be called fascist.

Revealingly, the section of Myers’ book devoted to 1998 to 2009, pages 55 to 66, makes only two passing references to *Songun* (Myers, 2010: 57, 65). One has to read until page 83 for a definition: “The term ‘military-first’ does not mean the armed forces lead the party; rather it is the party which, in accordance with Kim Jong Il’s will, puts the military first.” *Songun* was not simply willed into existence. “Military-first” politics and ideology was a tactical response by the North Korean state bureaucracy – in its own political and social interests – to the post-Soviet economic crisis, the Great Famine, the collapse of discipline in the ruling Workers’ Party of Korea, restiveness in the Korean People’s Army and the national security threat posed by US military encirclement with troops in South Korea and Japan. That response culminated in the elevation of the National Defense Commission (NDC) as the highest organ of state in 1998. Kim Jong Il has been NDC chairman since 1993. Jin Woong Kang (2007: 100) calls *Songun* “defensive war nationalism,” and Han S. Park (2008: 121, 128) explains that in the *Songun* era, “there is hardly any separation at all between the military and civilian sectors;” “the military’s culture is the North Korean culture;” and “[t]he tie between the family and the military is intimate.” *Songun* being ideologically and socially essential to North Korea for over a decade and having become a second official ideology in April 2009, there is no excuse to forgo its examination.

Conclusion

The claim of *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves – and Why It Matters* is that this is a work that finally engages in “ideological matters” in North Korean studies (Myers, 2010: 12). But centred inordinately on ideology and fascisising North Korea, the book does not examine what “North Koreans really believe,” as the dust jacket advertises. Erich Fromm (1961: 130), whose authority Myers appeals to, said, “[I]t is the very nature of ideology that it deceives not only others, but also those who use it. Hence the only way of recognizing what is real and what is ideology is through the *analysis of actions* and not in accepting words for facts” (emphasis added). Myers takes the “Text” for fact, performs amateur psychoanalysis and does not work through North Korean studies scholarship, much less colonial-era and North Korean documents, letters and testimony, to prove his claims. He speaks of “a xenophobic, race-based worldview derived largely from Japanese fascist myth” and “the continuity of the imperial Japanese worldview . . . and the official North Korean worldview” (Myers, 2010: 47, 166), but there is no comparative analysis with Japanese sources. Extrapolating from propaganda, Myers (2010: 32) also quotes a 1981 North Korean history, which recounts Kim Il Sung saying that those who worked for Japanese institutions should not be doubted or ostracised. That is insufficient. Ethnic-racial identity is undoubtedly glorified in North Korea. What is unacceptable is to source that glorification exclusively in the Japanese fascist mythos rather than in the convergence of the colonial-fascist

experience, anti-Japanese nationalism, Stalinist and Maoist influence, and the development of national-Stalinism.

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